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ABSTRACT

This tipsheet explains that an interpreter's role is to facilitate communication and convey all auditory and signed information so that individuals with and without hearing may fully interact. It outlines the common types of services provided by interpreters, and discusses principles guiding the professional behaviors of interpreters. When working with an interpreter, professionals are urged to remember: (1) the interpreter's role is to facilitate communication, not to work as a teacher's aide or to participate in class activities; (2) familiarity with the subject matter will enhance the quality of the interpreted message; (3) keep lines of sight free for visual access to information; (4) interpreters normally interpret one or two sentences behind the speaker; (5) allow time during class discussions or questions and answer periods for the student to raise his hand, be recognized, and ask the question through the interpreter; (6) the interpreter will relay your exact words, so address the person you are communicating with, not the interpreter; (7) try avoiding talking while students are focused on written classwork; (8) plan some strategic breaks; (9) encourage the students to wait until recognized before speaking or signing; and (10) captioned films and videotapes are strongly recommended. (CR)

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NETAC

TEACHER TIPSHEET

INTERPRETING

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Interpreting

An interpreter's role is to facilitate communication and convey all auditory and signed information so that both hearing and deaf individuals may fully interact.

The common types of services provided by interpreters are:

1. American Sign Language (ASL) Interpretation – a visual-gestural language with its own linguistic features

2. Sign Language Transliteration – sign language and mouth movements using elements of ASL and English

3. Oral Transliteration – silent repetition of spoken English

4. Cued Speech Transliteration – speech movements of English supported by handshapes and hand placements.

   All of these services may also require the interpreter to "voice" for the student who is deaf and does not use his or her own voice. The interpreter will vocally express in English what is signed, mouthed, or cued by the student.

Regardless of what type of interpreting is used in the classroom at your educational institution, all interpreters associated with the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) are bound by a Code of Ethics. The principles guiding the professional behaviors of interpreters are:

- Interpreters/transliterators shall keep all assignment-related information strictly confidential.
- Interpreters/transliterators shall render the message faithfully, always conveying the content and spirit of the speaker, using language most readily understood by the person(s) whom they serve.
- Interpreters/transliterators shall not counsel, advise, or interject personal opinions.
- Interpreters/transliterators shall accept assignments using discretion with regard to skill, setting, and the consumers involved.
- Interpreters/transliterators shall request compensation for services in a professional and judicious manner.
- Interpreters/transliterators shall function in a manner appropriate to the situation.
- Interpreters/transliterators shall strive to further knowledge and skills through participation in workshops, professional meetings, interactions with professional colleagues, and reading of current literature in the field.
- Interpreters/transliterators by virtue of membership or certification by RID shall strive to maintain high professional standards in compliance with the Code of Ethics.

The interpreter's job is to faithfully transmit the spirit and content of the speaker, allowing the student and instructor to control the communication interaction. The interpreter's primary responsibility is to facilitate communication. Instructors should refrain from asking the interpreter to perform other tasks as it may interfere with the quality of communication provided and compromise the role of the interpreter.

Things to remember when working with an interpreter:

The interpreter's role is to facilitate communication. Please refrain from asking the interpreter to function as a teacher's aide or a participant in class activities.

Familiarity with the subject matter will enhance the quality of the interpreted message. If possible, meet with the interpreter before the first class to share outlines, texts, agenda, technical vocabulary, class syllabus, and any other background information that would be pertinent.

Keep lines of sight free for visual access to information. In class, the interpreter will attempt to stand or sit in direct line with you, the student, and any visual aids.

Interpreters normally interpret one or two sentences behind the speaker. Speak naturally at a reasonable, modest pace, keeping in mind that the interpreter must listen and understand a complete thought before signing it. .

Allow time during class discussions or question and answer periods for the student to raise his/her hand, be recognized, and ask the question through the interpreter. This will allow the interpreter to finish interpreting for the current speaker and enables the student who is deaf or hard of hearing to ask a question or make a comment.

The interpreter will relay your exact words. Use "I" and "you" when you communicate with deaf individuals using an interpreter. Look directly at the person you are communicating with, not the interpreter. Use of third party phrases such as "ask her" or "tell him" can be confusing.

For interactive situations, semi-circles or circles work best for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

Try to avoid talking while students are focused on written classwork. The student can't read and watch the interpreter at the same time.

Plan some strategic breaks so that both student and interpreter can enjoy a mental and physical break from the rigors of the situation. Receiving information visually without breaks can be tiring and cause eye fatigue for the deaf individuals. Additionally, simultaneous interpreting requires the processing of new information while the information that was just communicated by the speaker is being delivered. For classes longer than one hour in which only one interpreter is available, a five-minute, mid-class break is essential.

Encourage the students to wait until the teacher recognizes them before speaking or signing. The interpreter can only convey one message at a time after indicating the speaker. It is important that only one person speak/sign at a time.

Captioned films and videotapes are strongly recommended to allow the student direct visual access to the information. If you are planning to show a movie or use other audiovisual materials, inform the interpreter beforehand so that arrangements can be made for lighting and positioning.

If the deaf individual(s) are not present when class begins, the interpreter may wait a few minutes for late arrival . The interpreter may be needed at another assignment and may leave if no deaf individuals are present after 10-15 minutes.

If the interpreter will be asked to read and interpret test questions, allow time for the interpreter to prepare for this assignment.

Alternative test procedures may be needed by some students. If the test has a written format (essay, multiple choice, or fill in the blank), the student may prefer to have the interpreter read and translate questions into sign language. Arrangements for this kind of testing should be made by the student and instructor with the interpreter BEFORE the test.

More information about the role and function of interpreters can be obtained from the national organization of professionals who provide sign language interpreting/transliterating services, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, in Silver Spring, Maryland.

For more information, contact:
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